

**“Think equal, build smart, innovate for change”
A call to collectively innovate and promote women's
meaningful participation and economic empowerment in
the Great Lakes region of Africa**

Gender disparity persist in all parts of society in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and this reality must reinforce our determination to address it through increased collective efforts. Women and girls continue to be greatly disadvantaged despite representing the largest segment of communities across the region.

Systematic prejudices, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), undermines the advancement of the principles enshrined in the African Union and United Nations Charters, to which all member states are party to. It is important therefore for us to recognize the suffering that so many women and girls face at the hands of the SGBVs perpetrators in the region and to take appropriate actions at all levels to bring a speedy end to these crimes. The need for ending impunity and for increased cooperation has therefore never been more important.

As we raise our awareness of the needs of our global society through the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, women must continue to be part of the narrative and take their rightful place at the table where thinking and innovation are occurring, and where ideas are turned into practical delivery.

While challenges remain, I welcome recent positive signals of progress, including the adoption of a Regional Action Plan, and the political transitions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic, all of which offer hope for increased women’s representation. This progress strengthens our resolve to continue advocating for a fairer, better and balanced Great Lakes region where women are agents of change and participate meaningfully in all decisions that affect their lives.

As the region joins the world in celebrating International Women’s Day, I wish on behalf of the Women’s Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the region, to call on all member states and individuals to embrace change in supporting a region that promotes equal opportunities to all for durable peace and stability.